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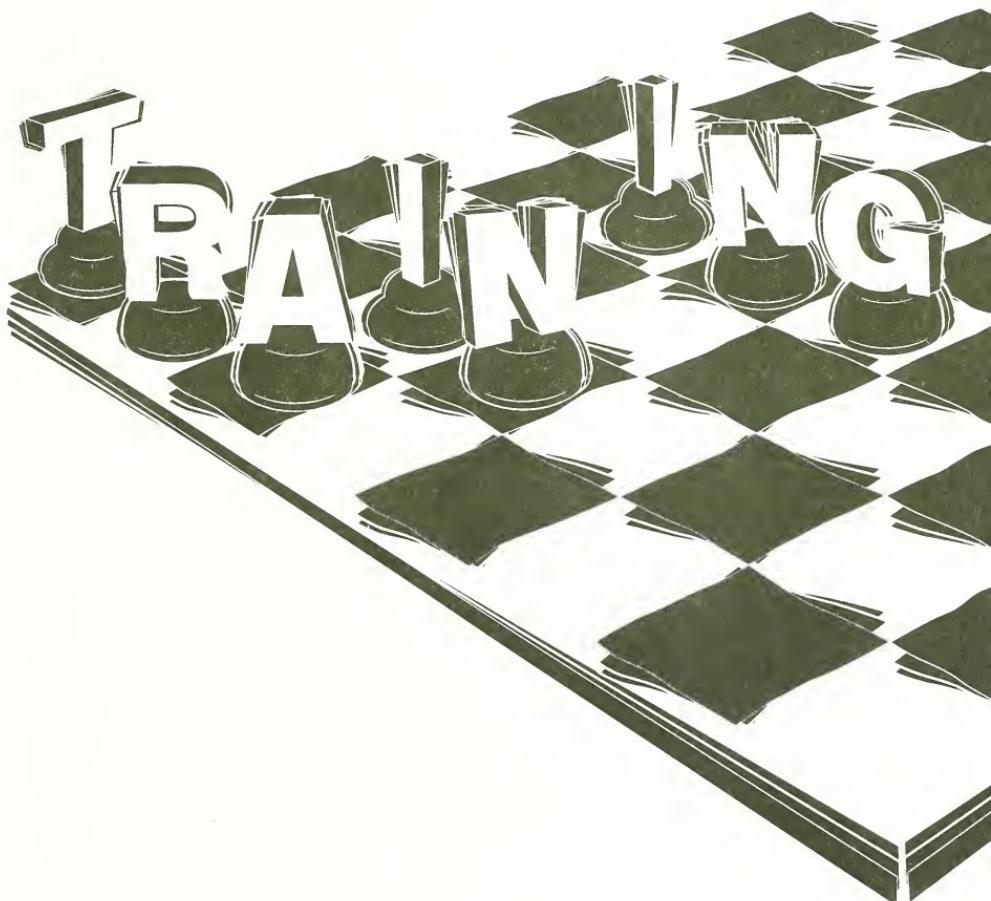United States
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Agriculture

Rural Business
and Cooperative
Development
Service

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Services

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Report 48

Cooperative Employee Training

The Strategic Dimension

Preface

This report defines and evaluates some techniques for training programs. Employee training programs, individual philosophy, and evaluation of training of four cooperatives are examined. Also included are key points for establishing training programs, or further developing existing programs, and evaluating them. Information for this report was obtained from a survey of four cooperatives, human resource textbooks, and documents on strategic planning.

Contents

Cooperative Employee Training: The Strategic Dimension

Beverly L. Rotan[1]

Innovations and new procedures necessitate training and retraining. Equally important is the role of training as part of cooperatives' strategic planning. Unfortunately, many organizations overlook the strategic dimension and consider training as an expense rather than an investment.

Training is an intricate part of cooperative operations and deserves the attention of the board and management. A cooperative's strategic plan should weigh the organization's weaknesses and strengths, particularly "people" or human resources. This assessment should include a comparison of employees' existing skills with those required by the strategic direction of the organization. Technological markets change. To keep up, cooperatives must find new ways to meet those changes and improve working procedures.

Certain skills are required before an employee can be hired for a particular job. For example, a mixer and feed mill operator must have mechanical aptitude, understand mill policies and operating procedures, understand feed programs, and be knowledgeable of feeds and their uses.

Both employees and management of cooperatives should be partners in the employee development process. Training and development help employees learn job–related behavior. Objectives and goals an employee should achieve through training include: improving self–awareness, increasing skills in one or more areas of expertise, and/or increasing motivation to perform the job well.

Training program goals should include the following: 1) orienting new employees to the cooperative and their jobs; 2)

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improving existing employees' performance levels on their present jobs; 3) enabling them to maintain performance levels as their present jobs change; and 4) preparing employees for new jobs. Successful training will increase employees' knowledge, productivity, and skills; lead to promotions; and increase margins for the cooperative.

These programs should be prepared and administered by personnel/human resource managers and specialists. They should work with line managers to identify training needs, recommend budget levels, and maintain a list of outside programs (university/seminars) that employees might attend. Employee development is influenced by labor market conditions. When skills are in short supply, they may have to be "made" (through training) rather than "bought."

Training, however, has one perceived problem. It is difficult to evaluate its effects or results—to determine whether or not learning has led to the desired behavior. In light of the increased cost of training, employee development efforts must be: (1) directed toward organizational and human resource objectives; (2) conducted only when they are the most effective way to attain these objectives; (3) designed to use state–of–the–art techniques; and (4) carefully administered and thoroughly evaluated for effectiveness.

The Development Process

Employee development/training should have several steps (fig. 1). Begin with analyses to determine the extent and nature of employees' development needs. Employee development plans are prepared to show overall objectives, program priorities, and resource allocations. These plans should indicate who will be trained in what, by whom, and when.

The process ensures that the necessary skill base either is or will be in place to fulfill the organization's mission, goals, and objectives. As each program is developed, training goals, program content, and the training techniques to be used should be considered. In evaluation, did the program meet its

Figure 1—The Employee Development Process[1]
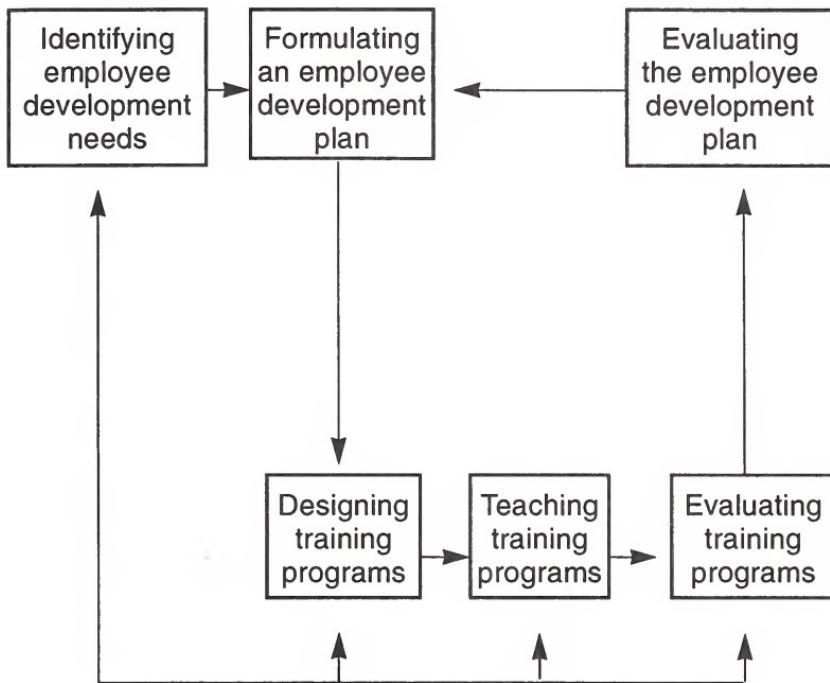
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[1] Heneman, et al. Personnel/Human Resource Management. Richard D. Irwin, Inc. Homewood, IL. 1983. p. 351.

objectives and at what cost? Did it fulfill overall objectives of the employee development plan?

Identifying Development Needs

To identify employee development needs: (1) Is there a potential or actual performance discrepancy? (2) Is it important to the cooperative? (3) Is it correctable through training? and (4) Is training the most cost– effective solution available?

Performance Considerations Does a potential performance discrepancy actually exist? A discrepancy in an employee's potential performance may be evident when he/she (1) is anxious and unsure about themselves and his/her ability to fit in; (2) never "catches on" to his job; (3) unable to meet deadlines or appears to require more hours than others to complete tasks; or (4) can't keep up with new developments in his/her field and refuses to try newer methods.

Performance discrepancies may appear as a gap between actual and desired performance. Tangible evidence may be indicated through sales, output reports, turnover, absenteeism, performance appraisals, or employee attitude surveys.

If the discrepancy presents potentially negative consequences to the cooperative, then there may be a need for employee development. If no significant consequence is noted, no further employee development may be necessary.

If the discrepancy is correctable through training, employee development is a potential solution. This is true especially when—(1) the discrepancy is due to a lack of abilities rather than a lack of motivation to perform; (2) the individuals involved have the abilities and motivation needed to learn the relevant material; and (3) supervisors and peers are supportive of the material to be learned.

"Person analysis" helps judge whether a performance discrepancy is due to lack of abilities rather than a lack of motivation to perform, or whether the individual involved has the abilities and motivation needed to learn the relevant material.

Formulating an Employee Development Plan

Employee development is a potential, if not the preferred, solution. It is preferred only when it is a relatively cost–effective way to correct an important performance discrepancy. Other possible solutions may include a job change, work aids such as instructional sheets or computational devices (calculators, computers, etc.), or rearranging tasks.

Next, formulate a strategy that addresses the needs of as many employees as possible with available staff, facilities, and funds. Start by (1) setting overall objectives; (2) assigning priorities; (3) allocating resources in priority order; and (4) integrating surviving programs into a working plan.

Priorities are sometimes hard to establish. First priority typically goes to those employee development needs that are legally or contractually required. Once priorities are determined, employee development plans will show who will be trained, major programs, timeframes, person(s) responsible, resources, and facilities to be used.

Each class should be evaluated periodically to determine if it effectively met its objectives and whether the skill base will fulfill the organization's mission, goals, and objectives. If not met, management should identify alternatives and decide on a new direction.

Determining Program Content

Program content is the material covered and the method and sequence of its presentation. To determine program content, the training designer should study job descriptions and actual work performance of trainees. Program content is determined by the instructional objectives peculiar to the job, job description and specification, and the information base available on the subject.

Participants influence the program content. The level of difficulty and rate of presentation must be consistent with the participants' current state of understanding and ability to learn.

The designer's beliefs about learning determine the program content and whether whole– versus part–learning is preferable. In whole–learning, material is presented all at once and then repeated. In part–learning, material is broken into smaller pieces. Generally, part–learning is preferable with complex material.

Figure 2 suggests that any given training program may have multiple instructional objectives. Short–run objectives

include knowledge, attitudes, or skills improvement. Long–run objectives involve job behaviors and organizational results. The programs discussed in figure 2 change trainees' job behavior and will benefit the cooperative.

Techniques

It is important to continuously prepare for a future of constant change by making effective investment in people, designing and delivering apppropriate training, and using the best possible tools and techniques. Employers and employees alike should be aware of changes in technology, work environment, job markets, customer demands, and employee performance. With this information, cooperatives can make more informed decisions about training.

With clear instructional objectives, training techniques can be formulated—"off–the–job" and/or "on–the–job." There are three "off–the–job" techniques—information presentation, information processing, and simulation.

Information presentation is taught with only minimal activity by the student. In this preferred technique, instructional objectives focus on knowledge, the content is not too complex, participants are relatively capable and self–motivated, large numbers are trained, and the budget is limited (except for high–cost programmed or computer–assisted instruction). A large volume of material is organized and presented to many people in a limited period of time. This trainer– or technology–centered style may not appeal to older learners accustomed to taking a more active role in their own development. Examples include: (1) reading lists, (2) correspondence courses, (3) films, (4) lectures, (5) panel discussions, and (6) programmed or computer–assisted instruction.

This material is presented through a series of carefully planned steps either in a booklet or on a screen. Students move at their own pace; answers are immediately graded; correct responses are reinforced; and the students move to new material. If the responses are incorrect, the student can repeat the material.

Figure 2—Examples of Instructional Objectives[1]

Type of Objectives	Examples
Knowledge	Trainees will understand and be able to receive at least a grade of 80 on a test designed to measure performance appraisal prnciples including types, uses, assessment procedures, avoiding errors, providing feedback, and Equal Employment Opportunity issues.
Attitudes	Trainees will believe that performance appraisal is important to effective management and that every employee has a right to receive an accurate appraisal annually.
Skills	Trainees will accurately appraise three videotaped examples of employee performance and provide high-quality feedback to these "subordinates" in role playing.
Job Behavior	Trainees will provide high-quality appraisals to their subordinates within 6 months after completing training.
Organizational Results	Trainee work groups will improve their performance levels by 5 percent during the first year following training.

[1] Heneman, et al. Personnel/Human Resource Management. Richard D. Irwin, Inc. Homewood, IL. 1983. p. 358.

Information processing techniques involve groups of students in the generation and discussion of subject material. This technique is used when the object is to enhance knowledge, especially complex material; participants are inexperienced or

lagging in self–motivation; and the number of trainees is manageable. These techniques can effectively change attitudes. This approach is commonly used to diminish sexist or racist attitudes.

New skills (communications and interpersonal skills) may also be learned through information processing techniques, such as: (1) college courses, (2) conference or discussion groups in which a problem is presented, discussed, and solutions considered, (3) conference or discussion groups where attention is focused on the behavior of both the group and the participants. Open and honest communication, particularly personal feelings, is emphasized.

Simulation techniques represent the work environment and involve the student. This technique is especially effective in developing the most skills because it requires practice. Examples include:

(1) Incident/case—Similar to the conference or discussion group technique except that specific cooperative problems are used in discussions.

(2) Role playing—Trainees respond to specific problems. The participant practices responding to a variety of problems encountered every day in the cooperative. Participants "learn by doing" rather than only talking about ways to handle a problem. This technique may involve role reversals.

(3) In–basket—The trainee assumes a role and makes decisions as presented in an in–basket filled with customer complaints, an operational problem, and personnel difficulties. The trainer provides feedback.

(4) Vestibule—Duplicate work operation outside the work site. The trainee learns under realistic situations, but apart from actual production.

(5) Mockup—Duplicate essential aspects of a work environment to allow introduction of specific problems. One example is the flight simulation used to train airline pilots.

(6) Business games—Simulate the economic functioning of an entire cooperative organization either manually or on a

computer. Trainees decide market strategies, pricing, staffing levels, and observe the results on sales and margins, etc.

Manual or motor skills are sharpened through vestibule training and the use of mockups. Leadership and supervisory skills are developed through role playing, problem solving, and decisionmaking skills using cases, in–basket exercises, and business games. Role playing may effectively change attitudes or develop skills. Participants reverse roles—supervisors play subordinates, etc. Trainees are forced to behave disagreeably and to define actions stemming from attitudes that are contrary to those held prior to training. Simulation can be a successful training technique, but the work environment technique is considered more successful. Some "off–the–job" methods may be done "on–the–job."

On–the–job techniques may include apprenticeship training, coaching, special assignment, and job rotation.

- A 2– to 5–year apprenticeship training program uses skilled tradespeople—carpenters, plumbers, pipefitters, electricians, cement masons, bricklayers, painters, roofers, sheetmetal workers, and printers. Programs mix classroom and onsite training.
- Coaching assures that employee development occurs in the day–to–day supervisor–subordinate relationship. The supervisor acts as a tutor, serves as a favorable role model, and provides guidance, assistance, feedback, and reinforcement.
- Special assignment puts trainees on temporary committees, projects, or jobs unrelated to their usual line of work.
- Job rotation moves employees through a predetermined set of jobs to expose them to many parts of an organization and to a variety of functional areas. Employees may spend from several days to years in different locations. Decisionmaking skills are increased in job rotation and prepares high–potential specialists for future general executive responsibilities. It also

compels people to broaden their perspectives, improve self–awareness, and become acquainted with a variety of people, processes, and technologies.

These training methods may be classified according to goals (purpose) and strategies (how achieved). Goals include making employees aware of their training needs, new or improved job skills, and motivating employees to perform the job well.

Cooperative principles and practices should be taught during the orientation for new employees to help them understand the organizations's objectives, mission, goals, and structure. Subsequently, they will learn the similarities and differences between cooperatives and noncooperatives. Cooperative employees have "first line contact" with member–owners and should be oriented to them as both customers and employers. Understanding the cooperative form of business helps employees be more effective in advising members how to improve their farm enterprises.

Orientation helps new employees adjust to working conditions of the cooperative. It informs them of the need to perform the job well and establishes a sense of belonging. Frequently, an employee handbook is distributed and contains (1) history of the cooperative, (2) cooperative structure and reporting relationships, and (3) employment policies (qualifications, equal opportunity, hours, breaks/lunches, overtime, wage/salary, holidays, leave, benefits, safety information, employee entrance, parking, cafeteria, etc.).

Teaching

Not all teachers/trainers have the ability to teach and facilitate learning. So, a few general principles have been identified to help trainers facilitate learning—goal setting, material presentation, practice, feedback, and classroom demeanor.

Setting goals and subgoals gives trainees an overview of what is expected of them and what the course will produce. Performance is enhanced when goals are specific and challenging—trainees' abilities are stretched and tasks are within

reach. Materials should be presented in meaningful, easily understood ways, and logical order. Practice expedites learning and should be spaced over time. Often, practice is cumulative. For example, at the end of each lesson, previously learned skills are practiced.

Feedback helps performance, keeps learning on track, and serves to reward and foster motivation. Some feedback comes from learning the task itself. Successful practice results in attained goals/subgoals. Other forms of feedback come from the trainer and/or fellow trainees through praise or criticism.

Lastly, classroom trainers should be professional, employ the best available training techniques and teaching methods, and treat trainees fairly and ethically.

Training Evaluation and Assessment Designs

Evaluation is the final formal phase. The first level determines if the various training programs were successful and the second assesses the extent to which the overall employee development efforts fostered improvement.

Trainee reactions are the best way to evaluate training. A more advanced level determines how much change in knowledge, attitudes, skills, job behaviors, or organization occurred among participants and to what extent this change can reasonably be attributed to their participation in the program.

Participants usually assess a training program during or immediately after the program through interviews or questionnaires. This identifies deficiencies in the course content, training techniques, and trainers. Positive results help draw support from management. This approach, however, provides no solid indication of learning or behavioral change or how much was due to training.

To assess change requires comparable measures of evaluation criteria before and after training occurs. Trainers must decide what criteria to use, how to measure them, and when. Evaluation criteria should be chosen in advance when instruc-

tional <u>objectives</u> are set because the two concepts are synony-
mous. Relevant criteria include learning in terms of knowl-
edge, attitudes, or skills; behavior improves or declines on the
job; or gains in organizational results.

Tests are used for measuring learning, questionnaires for
attitudes, or work sample tests for skills. Behavior may be
assessed by performance measures that indicate individual
output (e.g., units produced or dollar sales), use (dollar bene-
fits received from increased sales or reduced costs compared
with the dollar costs of the program), or through performance
appraisal. Other reports, such as profit and loss statements,
unit output reports, cost reports, and turnover records, may
measure organizational results.

Timing is also important in measuring learning. Most job
performance measures and organizational results may be
compiled before the program and several months after partici-
pants have returned to the job.

Evaluation may be simple or complex. Several methods
may be used to evaluate training programs and the subse-
quent behavior of the participant. Most evaluations are con-
ducted after the training program. Participants rate training
elements and instructor performance.

TRAINING ⟶ MEASURES TAKEN AFTER TRAINING

Supervisors may also measure the training result through sub-
sequent on–the–job performance. All cooperatives in this
report used this method. Employees are trained and their
effectiveness measured through reaction learning, behavior,
and/or results. But this design is faulty. No measures are
taken prior to training so there is no way to know if training
prompted any change.

Another measure is the pretest–posttest design where
testing or measures are made before and after training. The
time series design is similar to the pretest–posttest design. The
only difference is that the measurements/criteria are done

several times—prior to and during several subsequent periods throughout training. This design determines if a performance was consistent at a given level before training was introduced.

Each period of time distinguishes the differences between the pretest/posttest versus only a posttest. In the before and after design, these measurements/criteria are taken only once. This design enables the evaluator to determine up or down trends in the criterion measures prior to training that should be considered in assessing the program's effect. Conversely, the design is difficult to use for knowledge, attitude, and skill criteria and the cost is high. Both designs, the pretest/posttest and the time series, demonstrate if change has occurred. But neither can measure whether the change was due to the training.

PRETRAINING   **POST TRAINING**
  TESTING   ⟶   **TRAINING**   ⟶   **TESTING**

Other designs are more involved and less frequently used. They include the pretest–posttest control, the after–only test, Solomon Four Group, and the multiple–baseline designs. This form has a control group.

The after–only design works best for training at least 20 employees. Trainees are randomly assigned to either training or control groups. The control group receives no training, but may be contaminated if its members communicate with those in the group being trained, although this may be beneficial. This may motivate members to learn more. No employees are tested before training. Pairs of employees are matched with those of similar relevant variables such as age, sex, experience, and ability. All employees are tested after training.

The Solomon Four group design uses four groups and combines of the before–and–after–design and the after–only–design with a control group. Group A is pretested, trained, and posttested. Group B is pretested, receives no training, and is posttested. Group C is trained and posttested

but has no pretest. Group D has no pretest or training but is posttested. This design tries to reduce environmental influences. However, it needs a large number of participants to be effective.

The multiple–baseline design is similar to the Solomon Four group design, but requires only one group. Comparisons are made with individuals as a group—each person or group serves as his/her own control. The design includes two basic components: concurrent baselines—baseline data taken repeatedly over a period of time across either multiple behaviors or groups of people and staggered interventions. The treatment is first introduced with one behavior or group of people. When the desired change occurs (or after some predetermined number of training sessions), the training treatment is introduced with a second behavior or group of people. After an observed change, training is introduced with the next behavior groups until all are covered.

To evaluate training, comparisons are made between baseline and intervention phases to determine whether the effects of training are replicated at different times. If performance improves after and not before the training phase and each time the training is introduced (in its staggered fashion), it indicates the training itself was responsible for the favorable results.

An example of this design follows: training is needed for some grocery store clerks. Objectives are: keep clerks in the store, assist customers, and stock merchandise. Training for the first desired behavior (remain in the store) is introduced. The training clarified the desired behavior and its rationale is introduced in the initial half–hour session. Trainees are given time off with pay whenever they attained at least 90 percent of the desired behaviors. They are also given feedback on their progress via a graph posted regularly by the trainer on a bulletin board. Residual feedback is measured by recording progress on a specially designed checklist.

When improvements were noticed in the percentage of time spent in the store (after 24 observational sessions), the training approach was reintroduced with the second behavior goal (assist customers). Clerks began to assist customers regularly and continued to remain in the store (after 30 observational sessions). They were later trained for the third behavior goal (stocking merchandise). From the percentage of performance, the improvements in behavior are due to the training because performance increased only after and never prior to the introduction of each training intervention.

Cooperative Insights

Training programs of four cooperatives were surveyed. Three were similar in function, but varied in the size of sales. The fourth was a service cooperative. Sales for these cooperatives ranged from more than $7 million to more than $3 billion. The management of their programs demonstrate the linking of cooperative objectives with training, the importance of involving employees with the types and approaches to training that can be used, and the different ways to evaluate results.

Cooperative A

In 1992, cooperative A was owned by more than 90,000 farmer–members. Its 7,350 employees provided product and marketing crop needs and services, dairy and livestock feeds, pet foods, yard and garden products, and farm–related items. Employee numbers, including some part–timers, declined to 6,500 in 1993.

As with all strategic plans, the goal, philosophy, and objective of training must be established. Cooperative A's general objective of training is to be a cost–effective resource in facilitating employee development. The training center exists to supply the cooperative with knowledgeable and skilled employees to accomplish its immediate and long–term goals. Individual units have training objectives and plans. For the agriculture group, the purpose is ... to train and develop all

employees to meet or exceed customer expectations and be seen as the farmer's most valuable resource.

Cooperative A's training efforts are centered around programs in support of customer–driven initiatives. Of the total employees (including part– timers), about 85 percent are in nonmanagement positions. This translates into about one manager for every five employees.

Several ways are used to identify those needing training. Cooperative "A" identifies employees who need training through self and supervisor assessment or as a part of business strategies. Training needs in each unit are identified through focus groups and management.

All types of job–related training are provided. Programs are categorized as management, sales and marketing, administrative, and technical. There are more than 30 formal programs including coaching by supervisors and technical specialists and a reimbursement program. There are also apprenticeships that lead to the master level. Training is paid through corporate and unit funding. One percent of annual sales is devoted to training.

Permanent records are maintained for all employees who take courses and include when they completed them. Lesson plans and agendas are also kept on file.

To effectively evaluate training, participants and supervisors both rate it. Another measurement is through tests and the participant's subsequent performance. If training or instructors get negative evaluations, the course and/or instructor is reviewed and content revised as needed.

Cooperative B

Organized in 1923, cooperative B, a mixed cooperative, has 74 member cooperatives who serve 176,273 producer–members. This cooperative sells seed, feed, and fertilizer and has 3,600 employees.

Cooperative B seeks to develop employees who are effective in their work so that they can best serve the cooperative membership and develop professionally and personally. Good

employees expect and want training— personal satisfaction in a job well done.

An orientation program is used for new employees. Training is provided to new employees and employees with new responsibilities. Training is also needed when there is a change in procedure, new activity, unacceptable performance, and decreased productivity and performance. Employees are also routinely retrained.

On–the–job and formal training is most frequently used along with programmed instruction and college courses. Training costs are paid by the cooperative in all cases except with degree work. That cost may be shared by both employee and cooperative. Each division maintains its employees' records showing what training has been taken.

Training and instructors are evaluated by both participants and supervisors. Performance is the ultimate measure of training value and utilization.

Cooperative C

Cooperative C, a local service cooperative formed from the consolidation of two others in 1964, has 9,939 members and 150 employees.

Trained employees lead to greater realization of our mission statement to better serve our member producers, believes Cooperative C. Employee request, supervisor recognition, and divisional needs are the reasons for training.

Training is provided for technological adaptations, "new" employees, existing problems, and improving current employees. Training is generally job and/or career related, although some receive degrees not specifically related to the job.

A wide range of training methods are used, including formal, informal, programmed instruction, on–the–job training, and college courses. Training is paid for by the division and allocated in the budget. An annual manpower study is also conducted to identify employees who have abilities to progress into higher management positions.

Currently, the cooperative has initiated a computer program to capture and store training received by each employee. Training effectiveness is measured and evaluated by participants and supervisors, as evidenced by subsequent performance.

Cooperative C handles a negative evaluation differently depending on the type of training and instructor. Courses are analyzed as to "why" it received a negative evaluation. In such cases, the trainer or course content are changed.

Cooperative D

Cooperative D, a federated farm supply cooperative formed in 1938, markets grain and soybeans. It has 346 member–cooperatives and about 4,100 employees.

The mission statement for its employees' education and development says it, "... strives for the improved professionalism of system–affiliated people. Our core strategy is needs–based, lifelong learning enabling all people to develop their full potential." Both local– and home–office organized orientation programs for new employees are available.

Cooperative D believes that "all employees need training and developmental activities. The supervisor and employee must identify the most beneficial activities for each employee" to suit continuing changes that result from new procedures and activities. All training is job–related.

Different training approaches are used—formal, home study, on–the–job, job coaching, and selected outside programs when specific needs can't be met internally. A college tuition refund program is also available to all employees. Corporate funding covers all costs of formal training, excluding costs of travel, lodging, and meals.

Cooperative D believes in continuing educational and developmental programs for employees, directors, and others in the federated system. It supports career development programs for member cooperative sales people, system supervisors, system senior managers, and system support personnel.

Training program content is kept current and relevant to future work environments. Based on the changing needs of employees, the cooperative continually audits training effectiveness. Programs are revised to meet changing needs.

Essentially, training is approved by the board when it approves the corporate budget. Computer–based records are kept on all formal training programs that federated–system participants attend.

Summary

Regardless of function or sales level, all cooperatives in this report budgeted for training their employees and considered training an investment rather than an expense.

Defining, implementing, and incorporating training into the cooperative's strategic plans enabled it to be less reactive and more proactive. Strategic planning helps identify strengths and weaknesses of employees and operations and subsequently fulfills the organization's mission, goals, and objectives. All four cooperatives include training in their strategic planning.

Common factors in each cooperative's training program included accomplishing immediate and long–term goals; keeping records on training; relating training to jobs and careers; structuring orientation program for new employees; conducting training in programs ranging from vague and informal to structured and formal training (college); and training all employees.

Different ways are used to evaluate training. They may be complex and/or expensive and use control groups. Employees are tested before and after training. This filters out other influences to isolate the effect of training. All cooperatives choose the least complex form of evaluating training. Employees evaluated the training and instructor after each session. Managers evaluated training received through monitoring the employees' subsequent performance.

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Rural Business and Cooperative Development Service (RBCDS) provides research, management, and educational assistance to cooperatives to strengthen the economic position of farmers and other rural residents. It works directly with cooperative leaders and Federal and State agencies to improve organization, leadership, and operation of cooperatives and to give guidance to further development.

The cooperative segment of RBCDS (1) helps farmers and other rural residents develop cooperatives to obtain supplies and services at lower cost and to get better prices for products they sell; (2) advises rural residents on developing existing resources through cooperative action to enhance rural living; (3) helps cooperatives improve services and operating efficiency; (4) informs members, directors, employees, and the public on how cooperatives work and benefit their members and their communities; and (5) encourages international cooperative programs. RBCDS also publishes research and educational materials and issues *Farmer Cooperatives* magazine.